COLE BLEASE GRAHAM [CBG]: This is Tape 25, Side 1, an interview with Governor Robert E. McNair as a part of the McNair Oral History Project of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. Today's date is July 12, 1983. Governor, what were your thoughts as you began to make your way to the Chicago convention in 1968?

ROBERT E. McNAIR [REM]: I think the main concern we all had was trying to hold the party together and sort of help hold the country together. We were in the middle. We had come through the so-called civil rights period, the integration period, and we were--I think we'd gotten over the mountain top on that though we had a long way to go--but we had the Vietnam War crisis and the fact that that was building up to such a fever pitch and had become such a integral part of the politics of that time. We were heading for a convention that could get totally out of control and really be disastrous not only for the party but, we felt, for the country as well.

Primarily, we were the party in leadership, President [Lyndon] Johnson. We knew we were coming to a crisis-type situation, and then when the president made his very dramatic announcement on television that he would neither seek nor accept the nomination again, that threw us all into sort of disarray. I think we quickly--most of us who'd been active had gained such a high regard for Hubert Humphrey and had begun to discover the real Hubert Humphrey. So even those of us from the South found him to be the most logical person that we could rally around. At the same time, you recall, we had [Eugene] McCarthy, who was heading off [George] McGovern, who was on the horizon, and Robert Kennedy who was in the background. We saw Kennedy, frankly, as a divisive element in the party, one who could divide us and really destroy us, and, at the same time, we saw him as very vindictive, arbitrary, you know, the sort of

fellow who would be disastrous for us as a party and, we felt frankly, was not equipped in temperament, disposition, and everything to be president of the country.

CBG: Was that a Southern view or a South Carolina view?

REM: That was a pretty broad view . . .

CBG: A broad view from the South.

REM: Not just the South. At that time I had been in long enough to become active and had been chairman of several of the conferences and had just been elected chairman of the Democratic Governor's Caucus. The caucus had become a very influential part of the national political process for the first time. I think it's the first time the governors really got together, because of necessity, growing out of the [1964] Atlantic City convention where they didn't really play a role because of the divisiveness there. You couldn't get Mississippi and Alabama to pull together. Of course, in this one we had problems, but we were all trying to be a part of the national party again in 1968. We crossed over the "we're not going to be a part; we're not going to participate; we're just not going to the conventions" to "yes, we're going, and we're going to be a part of it, and we're going to be active in it."

CBG: Who were some of the sparkplugs of the Democratic Governor's Caucus?

REM: Well, we had John Connally, who had been chairman of the caucus just prior to me, and we had Harold Hughes from Iowa, who, you know, was emerging with his politics which were anti-Vietnam. Harold was a really fine, dedicated sort of fellow. You had to know Harold Hughes. Whether you agreed with him or not, you respected him because he was a deep thinker and a rather emotional thinker. In addition to Harold Hughes, we had Cal Rampton, who was from Utah, the Mormon state. He was a very

prominent and outstanding governor. It was really a very solid group. We had Warren Hearns from Missouri, and I think at that time, 1968, we still were pulling in some of the former governors, like the former governor of Florida, who was very active down there. He would participate with us, and Carl Sanders, of course, would participate on the side though we had Lester Maddox at that time. It was a good, solid core with Mills Godwin from Virginia, Dan Moore, who was a real stalwart, and they gave us the nucleus. Buford Ellington from Tennessee was a real leader, one of the strong ones, having been a former governor and having been chairman of the national conference.

CBG: Did this development occur spontaneously, or were there specific reasons?

REM: Well, it had started developing, you know, with the change in politics in the country. We had felt that we had to band together, both as a bipartisan group in the Governors' Conference, and this was when the National Governors' Conference really became a factor.

CBG: Yes.

REM: It had been sort of a loose-knit, social organization, and we put together the national conference as a real strong body with an office in Washington and began to involve ourselves in reviewing federal programs and testifying in the Congress, taking positions as governors, bipartisan. From that of course, the party caucuses became organized and strong because of the fact that we were the party in power, and we felt that we should exert some influence. We had a meeting at the Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs and sort of had a let-down-your-hair session. That's where the administration was taken to task behind closed doors, all of which was published in the press later.

Carl Sanders was one of the leaders in forming that group and helping strengthen it, and, of course, Connally was a force at that time. We had to become a political force. The party had been floating. The party had been run out of the Senate cloak room in Washington, and those people, as good as they were, weren't in day-to-day contact back home, and they really didn't understand the problems of the states and all. So that caused us to determine that we wanted to be a force in Washington, and we wanted to be a force in party politics, and we determined to have our scheduled caucus meetings. We discussed issues, and it was surprising that we developed as much unanimity as we did.

We had discussed prior to Chicago the fact that we felt that Hubert Humphrey ought to be the nominee of the party and that we could not afford to see that convention just thrown wide open in chaos inside the convention hall. So there was pretty much a consensus among the governors--not unanimity, because some would prefer Kennedy, but I don't think any of the others had any real support in that group--and we went to Chicago pretty well committed among ourselves that we were going to do all we could with our delegations, number one, to keep the convention from getting split apart, torn up, to hold it together, and, number two, to nominate Hubert Humphrey and to come out of there with some unanimity in a terrible political crisis.

CBG: One more thought about governors before we move to the convention. What is it that caused the governors to be able to spring forth with more political clout? Was it the federal programs?

REM: Yes, I think it was the federal programs. That was the beginning, you know, of all the federal programs.

CBG: They put light back in the state houses.

REM: That's right. We talked about this earlier, what it did to the states. It was sort of the catalyst, I reckon, to cause the governors to get interested, to become concerned and want to have a voice. The question, too, was what influence governors or states were going to have over programs in which funding was coming home. We were in a big battle with the cities. The big cities wanted it coming directly to them, bypassing the states, and they had tremendous political clout.

CBG: The Conference of Mayors was . . .

REM: The Conference of Mayors had long been well organized, and they had a strong lobbying organization in Washington. They worked at it, and then the governors had nothing. As we've said before, governors historically had no real influence in the United States Senate, the reason being that they were normally looked on as being potential opponents for one of the senators in office. Thus they weren't going to do things and help governors get programs and projects that were going to make them look good. They wanted it coming through them, and they wanted to make the announcements. They wanted to have the power, and we felt we couldn't operate that way. There was just no way we could continue with the hodgepodge type of system that we'd had, the pork barrel legislation system, and make it all fit together. So our position, as a new breed of governor, you know, as governors who were interested in planning and program development and coordinating and getting things done, was that we wanted to put it all into a plan for developing our states, and we needed to have a grip on it.

CBG: In going into the convention, though, the issues were pretty much limited as you described them a moment ago. This was not a platform or a forum in which to debate anything other than nominating a candidate.

REM: That was the thing we thought. I recall myself making a strong speech to the Democratic National Committee, one of the few that I had ever made. I said I thought it was time for Democrats to quit searching for those issues that divided us and start looking for those issues that united us and that we'd spent all of our time and most of our energies in cat-and-dog fights over what were minor issues, when it came for what was good for this country, instead of looking at the big picture. I'd like to see us put aside those minor, regional issues that divided us so much and look at the big issues.

CBG: Were you well received?

REM: Well received, extremely well received. Apparently, it was the first time that a southern governor had--and I give Don Fowler some credit for prodding me into doing that. But we went to Chicago with that in mind.

That was the first convention to operate under what we don't like to refer to as sort of a quota system, but where we really needed to have balanced delegations of blacks, minorities, and females. It was the first time that the credentials committee really operated on that basis, and that was the most divisive thing we had. Delegates to the national convention were nominated and elected at the state convention where you had a much freer hand in putting together a delegation. We determined here that we wanted to go with a delegation that wouldn't face a challenge. We were very fortunate in having a very supportive convention, and we were able to elect those delegates that we necessarily had to elect. Then the convention left the alternates and at-large delegates pretty well open, and thus gave me as governor tremendous influence in naming those. That's where we named the Reverend I. D. Newmans and the Reverend Bowmans and Mrs. I. S. Leevy Johnson, and people

like that, and the women, too. We happened to be the only southern delegation to the 1968 convention that was not challenged.

The credentials committee started meeting well in advance because everything was challenged. There were full-scale hearings, and the committee was chaired by Governor [Richard] Dick Hughes from New Jersey, who later became chief justice of their Supreme Court. Dick ran it like a judicial hearing, so it took an abnormal amount of time and got embroiled in all kinds of things, very divisive issues and problems. Unfortunately, he got the bug, like a lot of us were inclined to get at that time, and thought he could be the vice-presidential nominee and let that influence him to a great extent and let the credentials committee get totally out of control, one of the most able governors we had, one of my very closest friends and because of that friendship, his coming from New Jersey, people like that were coming from totally divergent political backgrounds and sections of the country. We were able to hold things together.

CBG: Did that process delay the convention?

REM: Well, it kept it in turmoil because it went right up to the convention, and we still had delegations, you recall, that weren't qualified to be seated when the convention was opening. One of the biggest and most bitter battles we had was Texas where they elect their delegates. They didn't come with a balanced delegation, and we also had a big fight that year over the use of the unit rule, that is, if a majority wanted to go one way, you had the right to invoke the unit rule and vote all of your votes. That was patterned under the old days to have a little power and influence. If you had twenty-five delegates and voted thirteen one way and twelve the other, you didn't have much influence but if you voted them all as a block one way, you could put

together a group of states and have strong influence. So that was a big issue, and Texas had the unit rule.

Senator [Ralph] Yarborough--to give you an illustration--who was the promoter of the turmoil and leader of the opposition, constituted one-half of one vote in the Texas delegation. John Connally was the leader of whatever the other number was, and they voted always, you know, whatever, ninety or eighty or a hundred to one-half, but Yarborough represented that new thinking, and therefore he had more influence than the rest of the delegation. Being the chairman, I was getting ready to go to the convention, and I got a call from Governor Ellington from Tennessee, who was there and had just been through defending his delegation before the convention. He was insulted that he had to defend Tennessee because they'd always been clean and good and open. And so, you had people like that, just totally insulted because they were having to defend what they were doing and I got a call from him saying, "You've got to get out here. John Connally is in his room packing his bag and going home, and if he 1eaves, the convention is gone." So I had to immediately drop everything I was doing a week early and get a plane from outside sources. I couldn't use the state plane, but I borrowed a plane and flew out there, and I stayed on then until the convention started. We met with John Connally almost all that evening and persuaded John Connally that he couldn't leave, he couldn't do that to the party regardless of how upset he was and how mistreated he had been and how offended he was and how insulted he was. He owed it to the rest of us to stay.

CBG: Did Connally seem to want to stay, or was this something that took a lot of persuasion?

REM: Connally was a fellow with a lot of pride, and it was hard for John

Connally to be kicked around and accept it. It was a difficult thing for him to swallow some pride and be abused and stay there and participate and all through the convention, to be abused when he had almost complete control of his Texas delegation. We had other instances like that, like Indiana where Roger Branigan, the governor of Indiana, came with a delegation, and if they had thirty votes, for instance, Branigan had twenty-nine-and-a-half he voted on every issue, and Birch Bayh voted one-half vote the opposite way. Yet Bayh was the star of the media and of a lot of the strategists for the convention, and it really created some difficulty and put it all to some tests to stay there, and finally we got all of them together as they arrived. I had them all in my suite, particularly all of the southern governors, Mills Godwin, the whole group, all very upset, all very disenchanted, and all ready to go in every direction in the world, and we sat there until we came to a--and what was happening in the meantime was the turmoil was being fed by the split that was existing with the McGoverns and the McCarthys and all of that--and we came to the conclusion that we couldn't let it fall apart, that we all had come as favorite sons so we could release them at an appropriate time. We all got together in a room on a Sunday afternoon and I recall coming to the conclusion that the convention was just about gone, it was just about to fall apart. Humphrey wasn't coming because his advisers, who were Fred Harris and [Walter] Mondale were telling him he had the nomination locked up, and he was losing it. We got together in the room and I made a phone call from my room. I said to him, “Mr. Vice-President, number one, we're here; number two, you need to be here. If you don't get out here, this things going to be in complete disarray.

We need your presence, your people are not telling you the truth. They're telling you you've got the votes. You don't have them." I think we had three or four hundred votes in our room that weren't his . . .

CBG: Right there. (chuckles)

REM: . . . at that moment. But I said, "We have agreed today that in the best interest of the party we're going to give you our votes. So you know now that you do have the nomination. Well, you've got to come." So we got him out there, and we paraded him around before all the delegations and put him out front. We were able, with all the riots in the streets that we didn't know much about and all, to hold things together and to end up with him winning the nomination. Harold Hughes and I helped diffuse it to some extent. We had the big vote on the unit rule, and I took a leadership role in allowing Harold Hughes--he and I were totally different--but allowing him to speak to the convention and announce that South Carolina--we were trying to say, "Let's don't change the rules in the middle of the game. You can't change the rules and apply them to this convention. Apply them to the future"--as evidence of good faith, South Carolina was taking the leadership in allowing him to announce publicly that we would abandon the unit rule on a voluntary basis as evidence of good faith, but the issue was--and it was a strong issue, you know, more than the effect of it--that you can't start changing the rules illegally. That was the thing with Connally. Connally was ready to go, and others were ready to follow, but fortunately we held that thing together. I really think that there were several editorial-type things in the Chicago papers that sort of got inside and said that the southern governors played a very, very prominent role in holding the convention together and bringing us out of there with some unanimity.

CBG: Did the Johnson people or the White House have any role or play any role?

REM: Well, see, President Johnson had announced that he was not going to either seek or accept, and because of the Vietnam War, everybody decided that it would be further divisive and disruptive to have him come. The Johnson people sort of stayed in the background. Most of them supported Humphrey. Most of them we pulled in to help. Jim Wright and all of those were Lyndon Johnson people and practically all of them naturally favored Humphrey over anybody else. They participated. They helped tremendously with the staffing and the strategizing.

CBG: But again . . .

REM: Prior to the convention and prior to going to the convention, we all became concerned, too, because Hulett Smith from West Virginia, who was very active--you leave out people when you don't have your list in front of you.

CBG: Yes.

REM: But we were all at a conference. We determined that what we'd like to do is just fly by the ranch. So we took our plane, state plane coming back from one and Hulett Smith, Buford Ellington, and I believe, Dick Hughes, about three or four of us, called President Johnson, who was at the ranch and said, "We just want to stop by and visit with you. So we stopped off and visited with him and talked some politics with him and talked to him about our attitude about the convention and how we felt. Our position was that we thought the president of the United States ought to be invited frankly, regardless of any of that. He had made his statement. We felt he could contribute to pulling us back together rather than further dividing us. He made the decision he didn't want to come.

Incidentally, prior to going to Miami in 1972, I took the liberty of calling him and flying out privately, personally, to the ranch and spending a couple of days with him, most interesting. That was just a short time before he died, and we had a very interesting opportunity to sit and talk about the whole political process. We talked about all of it.

CBG: Are there any parts of that that you'd care to talk about?

REM: Well, it was--it was interesting.

CBG: Just a general summary.

REM: Well, it was interesting at the human side coming out at how upset he was about the way it ended up. You know, “Where did I go wrong, what did I do wrong? I picked up a Vietnam that we were already there. We already made a commitment.” You know, he used the same expression he did publicly, “I didn't think this country could tuck its tail and come home.”

CBG: Yes.

REM: “At the same time I didn't think we could carry the big stick and bomb everybody and destroy everybody. I felt we had support, and we were trying to stabilize a government.” He was really searching for where he went wrong because he was very hurt. He was a fellow that liked people, and he was terribly hurt that he had ended up with the public feeling like it did. He was very hurt with Hubert Humphrey. He felt that Humphrey had let him down. I said, “You've got to recognize that he had to be nominated and hopefully elected president.” It was necessary for him to move himself out a little bit and to disassociate from the issues and the positions that would defeat him. But he had a deep feeling about that. The interesting thing to me was his discussions about Richard

Nixon. He had a higher regard and had closer communications than I had ever anticipated.

CBG: Yes. There is that enigma about Johnson in that on some political issues he really was, let's say, by contemporary standards quite conservative . . .

REM: He was, yes.

CBG: . . . like labor.

REM: That's right and he felt that what he had done was taken the country at a very difficult time, and that the bottom line was we were getting nowhere under [John] Kennedy. Kennedy was not able to get anything done in the Congress. He couldn't get any program through the Congress, and the country wasn't moving. He took it, and he moved America. He felt very deeply that, on the civil rights side, you know, there's what he had done, and he sort of felt the blacks had run out on him and let him down, and he was doing it out of the bigness of Lyndon Johnson's heart, you know, the old Texas rural background. He felt really let down, very depressed.

CBG: Do you think he ever achieved a personal peace of mind?

REM: I don't think so. I had planned to go and spend a few hours with him and ended up spending the night and breakfast the next morning and most of the morning, and finally I got away late the next afternoon. It was just the two of us, and to hear him and to have him sort of open up about individuals and how he felt about some of them politicizing the Vietnam War. He had some strong feelings about some of those. He recognized some of them as being sincere.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

CBG: This is Tape 25, Side 2, an interview with Governor Robert E, McNair as a part of the McNair Oral History Project of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. Today's date is July 12, 1983. Governor, moving back to the 1968 convention now, were there any troubles in keeping the South Carolina delegation together?

REM: We had the usual minor problems. We had a few people in the delegation who weren't going to vote for anybody else but me, but we also had one or two that when we left the favorite son role, really wanted to vote for Kennedy. Alan Schafer was one of my supporters and friends, but he just was adamant about unity when it came to Humphrey. He was a Kennedy man, had been all his life. Jack Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Teddy Kennedy. I think there was one other. So we had a terrible time of getting our delegation to be unanimous in its support of Hubert Humphrey, and that's what we were trying to do. We were getting him before each delegation and trying to get unanimity. We spent more time than we should in a closed session after his appearance trying to get everybody to be unanimous so we could go out and announce that we were unanimously endorsing Humphrey. Finally we had to go out and announce that we were, but we had a couple of dissenters from that. Generally the southern delegates were pretty enthusiastic by that time for Hubert Humphrey as an alternative to Robert Kennedy or to McCarthy or to the emerging George McGovern.

CBG: With your involvement now with the Democratic Governors Caucus, as a leader of Southern governors, and as a person in contact with Vice President Humphrey did you find yourself getting pulled into the nominating process perhaps as vice-presidential timber?

REM: Well, that, you know, sort of was a natural thing. Getting pulled in it was always--well, when you read a press release or heard something,

my name would be among those that would be--among those that should or would be considered or something like that. It really fevered up during the convention in taking a leading role and a mediating role in trying to pull things together and trying to keep Harold Hughes on board and keep Dick Hughes from running John Connally home and all of that, and he emerged as one of the four or five that were under strong contention.

CBG: You really can't design that, can you?

REM: No, no.

CBG: I mean it's not something . . .

REM: It's something that people will never understand. The one thing you can't orchestrate, I don't believe, is the nomination of a vice-president.

CBG: (chuckles)

REM: Take the last, the New York convention with [Walter] Mondale emerging as the [Jimmy] Carter choice. If you had said that beforehand nobody would have believed you. It wasn't going to happen. It was going to be, I've forgotten who--John Glenn or somebody else.

CBG: But certainly not the liberal Mondale from Minnesota.

REM: But in the course of the convention, it just became the natural thing to do, and that's what happened in Chicago. Looking back, our hindsight tells us that Larry O'Brien had it strategized to nominate [Edmund] Muskie all the way along. O'Brien was a Senate cloakroom boy. He didn't know how to operate outside. He never got along with the governors. He never could communicate with them and never was in their favor as a national party chairman, you recall. It was the governors who got together following the Miami convention and, in effect, said to Larry O'Brien, "We are going to replace you." Then we got together and formed that coalition that elected [Robert] Bob Strauss. But we had to

actually go to Larry O'Brien and tell him that we were dissatisfied. The party couldn't be run by somebody sitting on the throne and having the servants come in and kneel at the throne every morning and say, “What do we do today, master,” and that kind of thing. Larry operated like that. He was a backroom, brilliant strategist whose day had passed. Larry and I got along. We didn't like each other, but today we're friends because we respect one another. It fell my lot to help put that together following the convention. He was a Senate cloakroom guy, and we kept saying you can't run this party from the Senate cloakroom.

In 1968, we had to do two things. One was we had to go away from the Senate for a vice-presidential nominee. Second, we had to go south and the strongest voice for that was [Richard] Daley. We had the governors’ breakfast one morning, and Mayor Daley asked me about attending, and I said, Mr. Mayor, we'd be delighted to have you attend our breakfast. You know, it was unusual, but he was the host mayor, and I said, “We’d be delighted to have you attend. So Mayor Daley got up and wanted to make a few remarks, and his remarks were that he had traced history and this party can't win without the South. “This party's not going to win this time without the South, and if we don’t go south with somebody on this ticket, we're going to lose.” He was the most vocal advocate for keeping the South and pulling the South in. There are political scientists who think today, had Humphrey come south, he would have won with a hundred thousand margin, that he definitely would have won even though none of us really felt that Hubert Humphrey could win that election when we were in Chicago. There was vice-presidential-itis, but I don't think it was the kind of fever excitement that you would have felt if you felt you were part of a real exciting team that was going to win.

CBG: Did you find yourself then moving along from perhaps a long list to a short list and being involved more and more in intimate conversations with the Humphrey people?

REM: More and more until--it always gets down, and I don't know why, they always have the number five. There were always five on the short list . . .

CBG: Short list, yes.

REM: . . . and the press knows the five, and nobody else does.

CBG: (chuckles)

REM: And the way you tell the five is the press.

CBG: Yes.

REM: And when the press finds out who those five potential--even though you know it's going to be somebody else, or you know it's going to be one or two--when the press finds it out, they set up shop. I mean they just take you over and take over your suite, and they take over your movements, and they camp with you, hoping that lightning is going to strike them. That’s the way you really get caught up in this thing, is when the press picks you out and sets up in your room and your suite and follows you everywhere you go because you're one of the five. It makes for exciting times.

CBG: How did you . . .

REM: I confess it makes it difficult to exercise good judgment . . .

CBG: Yes.

REM: . . . like you had before that.

CBG: Had you planned for that? Were you caught . . .

REM: No.

CBG: . . . shorthanded with staff?

REM: Well . . .

CBG: How did all of this happen?

REM: Being the chairman of the caucus I had really ruled myself out all along. My strong feeling was then, frankly, that John Connally should have been the number two person on that ticket.

CBG: Humphrey and Connally.

REM: It would have been the kind of blend that we put together with Carter and Mondale, with Jack Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. If it had been Hubert Humphrey and John Connally, with Connally's posture and position and campaigning abilities in the South and all and the fact that he was not then totally repugnant to the rest of the country--he was a strong governor and had done a good job in Texas--but Connally was eliminated. I mean, he went out the window early, and it was just no question it wasn't going to be John Connally.

CBG: You think that was a Larry O'Brien decision.

REM: Yes.

CBG: Yes.

REM: A political decision at that time with all the dissension over the unit rule. We were making decisions for the convention, not for the populace out there at that time. We weren't thinking about who could win. We were thinking about who could get nominated under the circumstances, and that's where it began to narrow down, where Dick Hughes emerged because of his running of the credentials committee, and his appeal to the ones who were trying to turn the convention up and open it up, abolishing the unit rule, and all those sort of things. Dick's age and the fact that he overplayed his hand eliminated him, though he remained one of the five down to the final decision. And then, you know, it's confirmed when the night comes for the vice-presidential nominee

because the ones who are under consideration are the ones who are invited to make seconding speeches. I think that's where the word got out that I had misinterpreted the situation and really wasn't one of them because I didn't make a speech. The fact is I declined to make a seconding speech. I was invited, and they didn't get me until late that afternoon because I was out still working and doing, and then when they got me--and I probably can confess in hindsight--I was little perturbed and upset about the way the thing had taken place. I liked Ed Muskie, but I did not feel he was a good contender. I did not feel he was the right man for the ticket, and I just said, “Tell them you didn't get me.”

CBG: Yes.

REM: “You couldn't reach me.” So I declined an invitation to make a seconding speech. That's never, I've never said that before.

CBG: This was a seconding speech for . . .

REM: For Muskie.

CBG: . . . for Muskie.

REM: Yes.

CBG: So by that time it had been disclosed that . . .

REM: Yes.

CBG: I mean that he was . . .

REM: Yes, he was the nominee. That's when you get your call, late that afternoon. Would you make a seconding speech for Ed Muskie who's going to be the nominee?

CBG: And that's the tip-off.

REM: That's the tip-off.

CBG: I see.

REM: That's when the cameras fold up and everybody goes home and leaves you abandoned and drained.

CBG: Yes.

REM: And, you know, why did I get into this mess?

CBG: (chuckles)

REM: We've got some pictures of the height of that when CBS and those were set up and I couldn't get in and out of my suite. Nobody could get in to see me and I ended up with the same--what had everybody in my crowd excited was that I ended up with the CBS crew that had picked [Spiro] Agnew.

CBG: Oh, so they had a tradition.

REM: They had a tradition, and they thought they had another darkhorse,

CBG: Yes.

REM: Those fellows were really gung ho, and they were promoting more than I was, frankly.

CBG: Yes. Do you think by comparison the Republicans had some type of insight to move toward a governor as a vice-presidential candidate?

REM: Yes, oh, yes. They moved to a governor because the Republican governors were very strong about that. See the thing was, it was going to be [Ronald] Reagan, [George] Romney, or [Nelson] Rockefeller, and they all ran for president so hard and were such strong figures until the South would take neither of them. They sort of cancelled each other out. They cancelled themselves out, the three R's of the Republican party, and Agnew had a strong appeal to the South. He was from Maryland, which was a good location. His position was fairly moderate, conservative on fiscal issues, a very popular governor, popular among the Democratic governors. He would have fit in well. In fact, Buford Ellington and I--I hate to admit it today--tried to persuade him to change parties one time.

CBG: Yes.

REM: Linwood Holton and Agnew. An interesting thing, too, was that at the inauguration of Richard Nixon, Agnew had a private dinner party at his place. He had a dinner party the night of the inaugural ceremonies. There were about a dozen couples. One was Bob Short, who owned the Washington ball club. There were two governors and their wives invited to his dinner, and they were Buford Ellington and his wife and Josephine and me. (chuckles) He didn't, as you recall, have good support from the Republican governors, but the Republicans, [J. Strom] Thurmond and those, you recall, forged the southern position on that, and they forced it on Nixon for him to get the nomination commitment, and by the process of elimination Agnew emerged as the only one that somebody didn't veto. I don't think he was a choice. He was, by the process of elimination, the choice, whereas with us, we didn't go through that process of elimination. O'Brien had it structured that it was going to be Ed Muskie all along and all the pressures from Daley and the political figures to go south did not appeal to O'Brien and his strategists at all, never did, as you recall.

CBG: As you . . .

REM: So we felt that Larry O'Brien really was the fellow who lost the election, not Hubert Humphrey.

CBG: As you were, I guess the right word would be getting over, or, at least, summarizing the convention, what were you thinking? Were you looking forward to coming back home and campaigning for this ticket?

REM: Well, we knew what we had. We knew we had a terrible political problem in South Carolina. I knew that I had put myself in a pretty difficult political position by reason of being chairman of the caucus and having to be out front and to be one of those who had helped maneuver and orchestrate Hubert Humphrey's nomination, and getting that news media

credit for some of that didn't set well back home, but we had a terrible problem. We all recognized that. We had to come back home and really do some things to get ourselves squared away and get organized.

We did not feel that we could carry our state. It was not in the realm of possibilities that we were going to carry South Carolina for Hubert Humphrey and Ed Muskie. With somebody else, a southerner, on the ticket, we felt that we would have a shot at it, but with Richard Nixon and Ted Agnew both totally acceptable to the South at that time, politically we knew we had problems. So my problem was finding a committee and committing to raise the astronomical number of $25,000 to support the ticket. I came back home and put together co-chairmen. I ended up having to get my Allendale banker, Charlie Lafitte, who had been a long time Democrat, who's a friend of Bobby Baker's, always was a member of the president's Thousand Dollar Club and all of that, as the only fellow who was brave enough to do it for me, and Ernest Finney from Sumter. That was the first time a black had been a part of a campaign organization like that. So I got Charlie and Ernest Finney to head up the campaign, and we couldn't bring Hubert Humphrey to the state. That would have been disastrous. There wasn’t any point in bringing Ed Muskie because Ed Muskie at that time to most of us was about as dry and dull as the media portrays John Glenn, and Muskie had foot-in-mouth disease.

CBG: Was basically unknown.

REM: And was totally unknown, a nice guy.

CBG: Yes.

REM: A real friendly guy, a warm fellow, but he just couldn’t contribute a whole lot. So what we had to do was do the best we could without bringing our candidate and put together a committee. I was fortunate enough to get a few people like Isadore Lourie who would step forward and

participate and, you know, some of those rock-ribbed, longtime, double-dipped Democrats, as we call them.

CBG: Was there ever any pressure to bring the candidate? I mean, did the press ask?

REM: No. Josephine and I had several things planned. We were then building the mentally retarded center down in Summerville, and Mrs. [Muriel] Humphrey had been very supportive of all of that and was nationally involved in it. So we conceived the idea that we would bring her into Summerville to visit that center and then we would host a reception for her at the Governor's Mansion, until the local candidates heard about it. They all descended on me and said, “If you do that, you just tear us up . . .”

CBG: Politically.

REM: “You'll defeat all of us.” Senator [Ernest] Hollings just about went in orbit.

CBG: They really thought it was a . . .

REM: Thought it was a disaster. So we made a decision not to bring her. We couldn't afford to sacrifice our local legislative and congressional candidates for a lost cause. But that was the only real run we made at it. We just had the idea--Josephine did and I did--that with Josephine's image with the people and Mrs. Humphrey's image with the mentally retarded that Mrs. McNair could take Mrs. Humphrey and tour Summerville and come on back and have a reception at the mansion centered around the mentally retarded and the people who were interested in children. We might accomplish some good things and let people see that Mrs. Humphrey didn't wear horns and wasn't that horrible terrible person.

CBG: What about the development of the third party in South Carolina during the Nixon-Humphrey campaign?

REM: Well, frankly, we felt that was the only chance we had of carrying the state. In a head-on with the Republicans and Nixon, we knew we didn't have a chance. With Governor [George] Wallace coming on the scene, and, I recollect, with General [Curtis] LeMay for whatever purpose he was on there--it gave us a better opportunity of possibly eking out a victory in South Carolina. We were operating on the plurality system in the general election. The last time the state went for the Democrats was when [John] Jack Kennedy carried it, and that was because of the split in the ranks of the Republicans when they had the Republican ticket for [Dwight] Eisenhower and the Democrats for Eisenhower headed by Mr. [James] Byrnes, you recall. If you added them together, they carried the state, but with that split, Kennedy carried the state by, what, some ten thousand votes . . .

CBG: Ten thousand votes, yes.

REM So looking at the Wallace campaign from a practical standpoint, it was a plus for us because all Wallace did was take votes away from Richard Nixon.

CBG: Did the Wallace people have an active campaign in South Carolina?

REM: Well, Maurice Bessinger, remember, emerged during that time on his white horse as the great segregationist and the great Wallace leader. Wallace had a lot of rural worker, you know working people type votes.

CBG: Yes.

REM: He appealed strongly to them, totally anti-desegregationist, and that took a lot of those people away. It gave them some place to go.

CBG: Strong on defense, too.

REM: Strong on defense.

CBG: LeMay.

REM: LeMay tried to compete with Nixon on that. General LeMay was going to build a strong America. He was going to turn this country around. He was going to upset the Supreme Court in Washington, you know, and things of that nature. So Wallace had a strong appeal to a certain element of people and it gave those rural whites and the mill workers and others a place to go.

CBG: Were you disappointed with the outcome of the 1968 vote in the state? Was it a respectable showing?

REM: Well, you have to recall that that was the beginning of black registration and black voter participation en masse, and therefore we had to get involved in the first real voter education and voter registration drives in the state. With that, I'm not sure we could say we were disappointed, but yes, we were. We felt that frankly more of the thinking white people, more of the responsible white leaders would vote for Hubert Humphrey than we were able to get them. I don't think any of our social friends, as much as they liked us, as much as respected us--and they didn't get mad because of the position that I had taken--I don't think any of them voted for Hubert Humphrey. I think they voted for Richard Nixon, and I think most of my farm friends and most of my working people friends and all voted for George Wallace. They were the ones that got angry with you. I mean it was an angry type of campaign at that level. The Republicans were mean about it. They played dirty politics. You know, that was typical of dirty Dick Nixon, and that was when Harry Dent was in his heyday. Harry was the master of dirty pool, dirty politics, and so we were involved in what was a nasty, dirty campaign, really, and one that upset you tremendously, to see people, particularly people of the level that were involved, get to such low levels, say such

degrading things and spread such malicious rumors about what was going on.

CBG: Would this be an example of dirty politics, not angry politics, but dirty politics like innuendo in speech?

REM: Yes, and just every little thing that you could get. I thought and we all said that was a level that wasn't good for politics and certainly wasn't good for South Carolina. It created a type of political atmosphere. It was difficult to reason with people or to work with them, and all we could do was to try to get some realistic, reasonable facts out and hope that some people would see them and listen to them. The problem was Hubert Humphrey. With Hubert Humphrey you could never get away from 1948. That was the thing we kept saying to him, that if it wasn’t for 1948, he’d be the most electable man that the country has at this time. He really was an ideal candidate for the time, when you got to know him. When you knew Hubert Humphrey, when you saw his positions on so-called business issues and all of that, he was very solid, and, you know, his civil rights program was a reasonable program in the sixties. It was just twenty years ahead of itself in the forties. He got that image, and he couldn't live it down, and there was nothing we could do about it. Even by associating ourselves with him, we couldn't change what the people in the South thought about him, you know, when he raved and ranted at the convention and ran us out. In our minds, he sort of invited us to leave the party, and there was no place for us. It was difficult to ever get that image that he developed then out of the minds of people.

CBG: Have your opinions about the 1968 campaign and election changed over the years? Do you have feelings now that may not have surfaced right after the election?

REM: Not a whole lot. My only concern is that a lot of us approached it with sort of a defeatist attitude and went through it with a feeling we couldn't win, when, in fact, if we'd done a little bit more, we'd have won the election. It wouldn't have taken a great deal more to have won that election.

CBG: Because, after all, the Democrats were the party in power.

REM: They were the party in power, and when you think that that thing closed up to 100,000 popular votes in this country, it was phenomenal, fantastic, unbelievable that it got that close. All of us the next day and the next week were saying, “If we'd done a little more, we'd have won this thing.” But Humphrey kept telling us he was the champion. You know, he was the cheerleader. Unfortunately, he was his own cheerleader. “I can win this thing. I just need a little more help. If we can't carry South Carolina, if you'll all zero in or go to so-and-so, we can carry that state.” A few of us were invited around to make some speeches, but not a whole lot. Nobody was really going beyond the call because they didn't think they could be successful.

CBG: Did you have any inkling in 1968 that [George] McGovern would be the nominee in 1972?

REM: Well, in 1968, I would have said George McGovern will be the last fellow to be nominated for president. I said that prior to the [1972] Miami convention. That was the only prediction that I would make. I was with a group of corporate officials, a rather major group, invited because of my involvement and all just to come in a closed door and talk politics by the chairman of one of the big companies. I’ve laughed about this with some of them and said, “I'm sure you don't ever want me back as a political analyst. I only made one prediction. It won't be George McGovern.

END OF TAPE